

A Word of Introduction

A historian of Christian thought will appreciate the significance of terminology used by Church fathers to expound the faith. The Syrian Churches, both Eastern and Western, inherited their terminology from Greek patristics with reference, as much to the doctrine of God, as to that of the person and nature of Jesus Christ. But there is a difference here. Whereas with reference to the doctrine of God the East in general follows the legacy of the Cappadocian fathers in the use of terms, no such agreed tradition exists in the East concerning the doctrine of the person of Christ.

To be sure, there are three traditions in this regard, the Nestorian, the Cyrilline and the Chalcedonian. The first of them came to be kept up in the Persian or East Syrian Church, the second in the West Syrian Church and the third in the Byzantine Churches. An attempt is made in this paper to see how each of these Church bodies employs terminology to defend its theological standpoint.

Technical Terms: In the doctrine of God

God is one being and three persons. Each of the three persons is of the same being with the other two. The word for being is Ousia or Ithutho and the word for person is gnumo. The one ousia signifies one Kyono as well. There is a fourth word parsupo, which also is translated as person. The technical terms then are:- Ousia or ithutho, Kyono, gnumo and parsupo.

All these terms are taken over from the Greek patristic tradition, traceable particularly to the Cappadocian theologians. Thus the word ousia in Greek is a participle feminine of eimi meaning "to be". This word itself is written in Syriac, which has ithutho corresponding to it. A noun formed of ith which means "to be," ithutho refers to being or in^{is}ness (if this is permissible in English). The word Kyono is derived from Kon which has also the meaning "to be", "to exist", "to be found". The passive form Kon is Ethkin, "to be formed". Linguistically there is thus a real connection between ousia or ithutho and Kyono. God is one ousia whose Kyono is one

The Syriac gnumo is employed as a word corresponding to the hypostasis in Greek. This word is substantia in Latin or substance in English. As such, it should be a synonym for ousia, but because it is more specific the Cappadocian fathers separated them, reserving ousia for being per se, or the common reality underlying all the members of a class, and hypostas^{is} or gnuma^e for each of those particular members. To illustrate the point,

the ousia of God is Godhead. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are the three gnumae, each of whom having the ousia individuated in him in perfection. Since it is the same ousia individuated in fulness in each of them, they can not be differentiated one from another at the level of the gnumo. They are differentiated in prosopon or parsupa. This word means "face" or 'appearance', but in theological parlance it has a deeper meaning. The three gnumae of God can be distinguished by us in our minds, but they are differentiated as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three pursupae.

the emphasis thus:

With reference to God, ~~thus~~ we can sum up: God is one ousia possessing one Kyono and three gnumae, who are distinguished one from another as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *in Logic*

Terminology in Christology

these. In Christology also the technical terms are on the whole ~~therefore terms~~. There are a few other terms, which we shall see as we proceed: All the three traditions agreed that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. As God, he was the incarnate Son, the Second person of the holy Trinity. The Son is bar ousia or bar ithutho with the Father; which meant that the ousia or being is the same for the Father, the Son and the Holy spirit. As man, he was human in perfection and reality. The two realities were so united that Jesus Christ was one Son and one Lord.

On the question of the union they differed.

1. The Nestorian School.

The union - huyoco or henosis - was the conjoint existence - naqiputho or sunapheia - of God the Son with the human. God the Son is a nature - Kyono - with its own properties including gnumo and parsupo eternally on his own right. But the human was not so; it was created by the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Virgin mother's womb, and from the formation of the embryo God the Son brought it in to a state of union with himself. Thus the human was conjoined with the parsupo of God the Son. The human was a nature with its own properties including gnumo. By the way, though Kyono or nature can be discerned by the mind, it has always gnumo going with it. Jesus Christ did not receive the human parsupo along with the conjunction, but was taken into the parsupo of God the Son.

Here there is a question for which I have not yet seen an answer in Nestorian writings. Does this mean that the human had no parsupo at all, or that it was merged with the parsupo of God the Son?

The Naqiputho took place along with the formation of the embryo, so that there was no time gap between the creation of the embryo and the naqiputho. Therefore Jesus Christ was always one Son and Lord.

This emphasis of the Nestorian school was not properly weighed by its critics. Cyril, Philoxenos, Severus and others see that the Nestorian position posits a time gap here. This certainly is denied by it.

From the formation of the embryo ⁱⁿ with the conjunction, the human was unceasingly indwelt by God the Son. From the state of union he left the human to grow into meaturity corresponding to every stage in life, triumphing over every temptation to sin. The human was a nature with its properties including its qnumo

The Theotokos controversy should be viewed in this context. The question of Theotokos as applied to Mary was an issue on which men of the two schools fought at great length. The Nestorian side expounds the position in this way. It is Jesus Christ, the one Son and one Lord, that the Virgin brought forth. The Son was conceived and brought forth not in his Godhead born of the Father from eternity, but in his human nature. That was born from Mary ^{Αδελφως} unitedly. She was therefore the mother of Christ - ^{Ενωσως} for Christ refers to God the Son united with man. Viewed in the light of the process of nature, she was mother of man. But as the man was, from the beginning of his formation in the womb, conjoined with God the Word, God having taken him and indwelt him as in a temple by means of the union in prosopon - ^{πρὸς ὡπὸν} she is ^{Μητέρα}, though God the Word did not receive a beginning to himself from there.

Regarding the meaning of terms all the three traditions have agreement among them. They disagree only as to the application of the meaning. There is one point emphasized by the Nestorian school as defended by Babai Magna; which should be noted here. He says that qnumo is fixed, so that it can not be given or received is parsupo. On this ground he criticized the one hypostasis of both the Cyrilline school and the Chalcedonian definition. In his view it is an impossibility to grant one hypostasis, we can affirm only one parsupo.

This clarification of Theotokos by the Nestorian side was clear enough, but the Alexandrine side and the Chalcedonian side were not willing to take the explanation of its face value. Thus the controversy was continued.

1) The Chalcedonian and the Non-Chalcedonian sides

The Council of Ephesus of 431 was a great success for the Alexandrine side. Following it, though the Nestorian tradition tried to make up its losses, it did not succeed. It was in that context that the council of Chalcedon of 451 met. At this

Council the Nestorian leaders cooperated with the triumphant party and worked behind the scene to make it adopt a definition of the faith. This definition affirmed that Jesus Christ was one hypostasis and one prosopon made known "in two natures".

Strict Alexandrines saw in this statement only a sanctioning of the supposed Nestorian effort at dividing Christ into two Sons by the council. They did not attach much importance to the one hypostasis of the definition, for the one hypostasis was taken by many at the council as a synonym for prosopon. Since the Latin persona agreed in meaning more with prosopon than with hypostasis, the west itself may have understood the emphasis only in that sense during the early days.

Realizing the gravity of this problem, the Chalcedonian side in the East worked out a theological position in the 6th century; which many western scholars in the field refer to as "Neo-Chalcedonianism". It moved away from Chalcedon's anti-Ephesine and anti-Cyrrilline orientation to a very definitely Alexandrine standpoint.

The opponents of Chalcedon followed the Alexandrine tradition developed by Cyril of Alexandria. They adhered to the expressions, "from -ek- two natures", "hypostatic union", "One hypostasis and one prosopon", and "one incarnate nature of God the Word". Critics of the Alexandrine position raised objections to them. For one thing, they took the "form"-ek- as referring to the before of the union. ^{Confining} ^{Combining} it with the other expressions, they read into the Alexandrine emphasis an affirmation that, though the natures were two before the union, in the union one of them was either lost or continued quiescent. Faced with this challenge, Severus of Antioch developed the Alexandrine teaching in a significant way.

In the 6th century Severus clashed with the Chalcedonian side which then had John the Grammarian of Caesarea as its theological spokesman. The Grammarian, one of the founders of "Neo-Chalcedonianism", accepted all the Alexandrine phrases, but insisted that the "in two natures" of Chalcedon should be added to them in order to ensure the dynamic continuance of the two natures in the one Christ. In this effort he made out that the nature in "from two natures" and "in two natures" should be differentiated in meaning from the same term in "one incarnate nature". Both Severus and the Grammarian were agreed that the word had the meaning either of ousia (or the common) or of hypostasis (or the particular). But the Grammarian, taking his clue from the Platonic tradition which conceived the ousia - eidos - as existing in a world of its own apart from all particulars, regarded the word "nature" in the phrases "from two natures" and "in two natures" as ousia, but in the "one incarnate nature" as

particular. Severus challenged it in the light of the Aristotelian notion that ousia and the particular go together. If the union in Christ were of the ousias, Severus argued, it would mean that the Holy Trinity, became incarnate in the whole human race. He took the word nature in all the phrases as hypostasis or particular. In this way Severus conserved the historical reality of Christ against the Chalcedonian theologian. For Severus, the "from" of the phrase "from two natures" does not refer to the before of the union, but to the dynamic continuance of the two natures in the one Christ. Thus Christ was always, every moment of his life, composed of the two natures of Godhead and manhood; the stress of the ek is therefore on the indivisible unity of Christ. Hypostatic union was taken by the Alexandrians to mean that the union was inward and real. Every thought which Christ entertained, every word which he spoke and every deed which he performed had behind it the union of the natures at work. Regarding them, however, it is necessary to draw a distinction between those that are divine and those that are human, signifying that in reality he is at once God and man. In the union there was an exchange of properties, so that things divine could be ascribed to the human and things human to the divine.

Conclusion

The Grammarian's position stood in need of correction, though he was unwilling to take it from Severus. Leontius of Byzantine^{um} is believed to have offered it to the satisfaction of the Eastern Orthodox tradition and John of Damascus sanctified it. The revised edition of A History of the Christian Church by Williston Walker writes of Leontius "He viewed the human nature neither as having its own hypostasis (centre of being) nor as being abstract and impersonal but as united with the Word (enupostatatos) as its subject, and never existed as an entity independently of Him". The revisers note, to their credit, that Severus had "foreshadowed" Leontius. They could have said more had they read Severus more objectively and without their inherited prejudice in favour of Chalcedon. The truth of the matter is that Chalcedon divided Leontius from Severus; as Ephesus did with the School of Antioch from that of Alexandria.

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